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ARRANGEMENT AND DISPLAY OF PICTURES.

BY GILBERT R. REDGRAVE,

Secretary of the Technical Commission of Great Britain.

THE improvement in public taste, and the knowledge and love of art which is daily on the increase among us, cannot fail to be accompanied by a desire to possess pictures and works of art, for the decoration of our homes, and we think that a few remarks concerning the best methods of displaying these pictures, and hanging them upon our walls, cannot fail to be acceptable at the present time.

It would scarcely be within our province to give any rule for the choice of paintings; to point out which to select and which to avoid, and to state the characteristic features of good and bad art. The amateur collector of paintings has much to learn before he can trust to his own judgment in these matters, and he can only hope, after many failures and mistakes, and after much careful observation, to arrive at a knowledge of what constitutes true artistic excellence. But in these days of good engravings and etchings, of lithographs and heliotypes, and of permanent photographs of all kinds, there are many varieties of decorative art in which no one can be mistaken, and which enable the owner of the humblest cottage to surround himself with artistic productions, little inferior in merit to the treasured masterpieces of the wealthy connoisseur. Of course we mean only in respect to the quality of the art, and leave out of consideration here the question of executive skill, texture, gradation of color, tone, and all those delicate details which are concerned in the true work of fine art.

Let us assume, however, that the pictures have been procured, and pass on to the special purpose we have set before ourselves. First, we may point out some of the chief matters which must be studied in displaying these pictures, and placing them where they will be seen to the greatest advantage.

We will preface our observations with a few remarks concerning the frames of pictures. It is a common saying that "a picture is nothing without its frame," and it is no doubt true that the provision of a suitable frame is of the highest importance. It is the custom at present, when we buy modern pictures, that the artist should select the frame for his work, and the purchaser obtains the painting or drawing with the frame which he is justified in believing that the painter deems most appropriate for it. The picture buyer is thus, in a great measure, dependent upon the judgment of the artist, and though we are far from believing that in this matter the artist is invariably correct, we may assume that his choice would be based upon better information and sounder taste than that of the amateur. One of the most common mistakes that is made in the selection of frames consists in what is called "over framing" the picture, that is, in providing too broad and too massive a frame for it. It is almost impossible to lay down any general rules with respect to the proportionate width of the frame, as compared with the size of the painting it is to contain, but it is a far too common error to find the scale of the frame greatly exaggerated. It is most important that the frame should not be of a character to attract the attention of the spectator before he has studied the picture. A gaudy and brilliant frame may often seem to the unskilled observer the chief thing to admire, and the artist who has produced a work of which he is extremely proud, and who has fallen into the error of providing it with too showy a frame, may often experience the mortification of hearing the frame praised before the picture. The more quiet and subdued is the tone of the painting, the more sober should be the character of the frame. The brilliant pictures of the Venetian school look well, no doubt, in the fine carved and gilt frames in which we frequently find them, while the delicate works of the earlier Italian masters never look better than when quietly enshrined in a plain oak frame, or in one of black and gold. Nothing is so liable to give an appearance of vulgarity to a picture as a staring inappropriate frame. After some considerable experience in the designing of picture frames, we can confidently assert, that the plainer and simpler the decoration of the frame, the better will be the impression produced by the picture, and it is far preferable to err in the direction of simplicity, than to incur any danger of overframing our treasures.

It is the general opinion of artists that a painting never looks so well again as it did in the studio in which it was painted, under the exact conditions of lighting, and in the particular position as respects the spectators, selected by the artist; whilst

in public exhibitions and even in the cabinet of the amateur, we constantly find the picture is "ruined," as the painter would say, by the way in which it is hung. We will endeavor to point out how this may arise, and if we can explain the reasons for such failures, we may learn how to avoid similar mistakes in our own homes. Firstly, on the principles of perspective there can be only one point from which the picture can be viewed, in order to present the same scene as the artist saw and has placed on canvas—namely, exactly opposite the focus or "eye" of the picture, as it is called, and it is manifest that to see the picture in perfection it should be placed at such a level as to enable us to view it at this same height, and from the requisite distance. The height represented by the level of the eye of the individual of average stature is termed, in picture exhibitions, "the line," and pictures placed above or below this level are said to be hung "above," or "below the line." The best and most attractive pictures are always selected for position on "the line," which is essentially the post of honor. In arranging pictures in our own house, also, we should endeavor so to dispose our furniture, dados and panels as to admit of the placing of the pictures which we value most, at about the same level. Pictures, be it remembered, if they are good, are far the most valuable objects

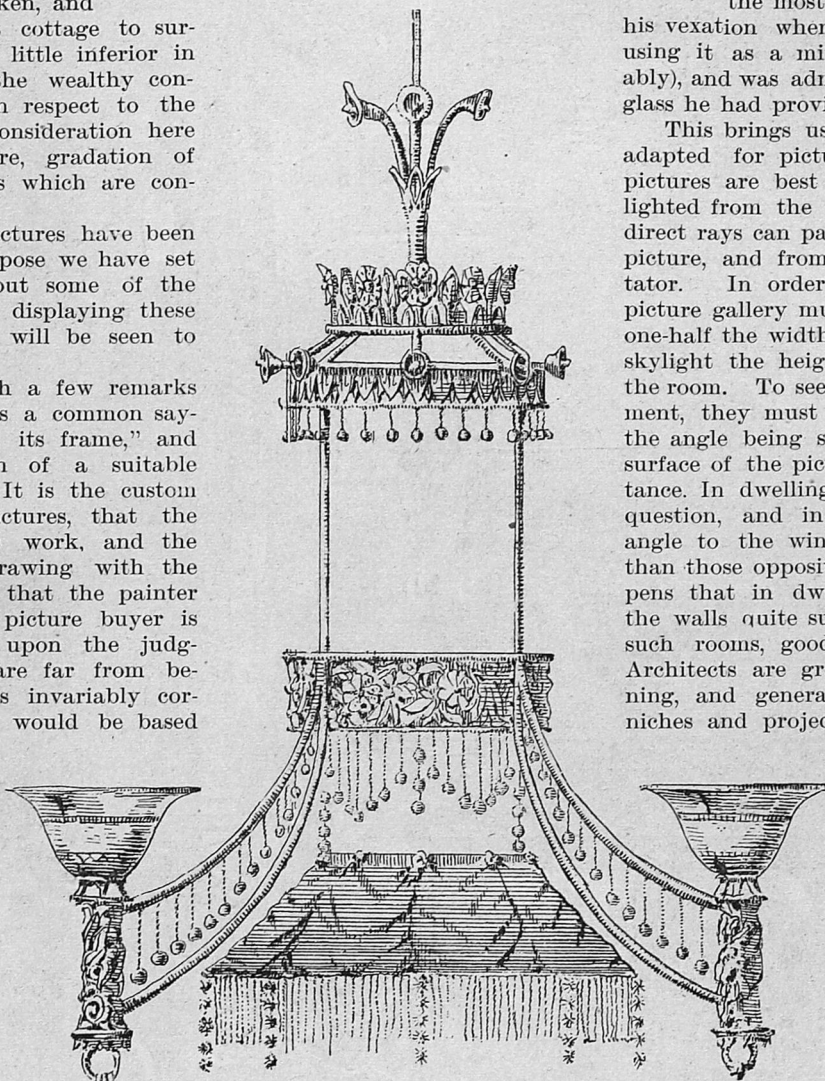
Walls, on which pictures have to be displayed, should have nothing staring or startling in the paper or hanging. The pattern should be neat and small. Nothing is better than a simple repetition of some small figure a few shades darker than the tint of the paper, relieved with a little gold. In a large room with plenty of light, the paper may well be a little darker than in a small apartment. As a general rule, pictures look best on a dark rather than on a light background. Of course water colors framed with white mounts form an exception to this rule. In arranging pictures, even on an unsuitable wall paper, much may be done, as we shall point out later, by the careful choice of appropriate pictures to serve as neighbors or "foils."

In the matter of putting glass over pictures, it is also difficult to pronounce an opinion which shall meet all cases. Oil pictures rarely look well under glass, and seldom need this protection. With a dark, sombre oil painting a glass is often a great nuisance. We well remember the story of an artist, who was watching his picture (which he had carefully protected with glass) at a public exhibition. He saw people look at it more or less attentively, till he was at length delighted with the minute investigation it received from a lady who posed herself before it, and looked at it with her head in various attitudes, in what he conceived the most appreciative manner possible. Imagine

his vexation when he found at length, that she was only using it as a mirror (for which purpose it served admirably), and was admiring the set of her new bonnet in the glass he had provided for her.

This brings us to the consideration of the light best adapted for pictures. There can be no question that pictures are best seen when placed in rooms or galleries lighted from the top, the light being so arranged that no direct rays can pass from the skylight to the surface of the picture, and from it be reflected into the eye of the spectator. In order to avoid this, a properly proportioned picture gallery must have a central skylight not more than one-half the width of the room, and from the floor to the skylight the height must not be less than the width of the room. To see the upper pictures well, in a lofty apartment, they must be inclined slightly forward at the top; the angle being so adjusted that no glare appears on the surface of the picture, when looked at from a proper distance. In dwelling houses top-lighting is often out of the question, and in side-lighted rooms the walls at right angle to the windows afford better position for pictures than those opposite the windows. It very frequently happens that in dwelling rooms there is really no place on the walls quite suitable for the display of pictures, and, in such rooms, good paintings are entirely thrown away. Architects are great sinners in this respect in house planning, and generally contrive to give all sorts of useless niches and projective chimney breasts and recesses, which sadly cut up the walls. It is most important, when we have valuable pictures to hang, and have selected appropriate wall papers upon which to display them, that we make choice also of suitable curtains, portieres and upholstery. These must be of such a character as to harmonize with the pictures and the paper, and to avoid all danger of obtruding themselves upon the spectator's notice. Good taste in our carpets, our chair covers, our mats and our hangings is all important, if we make up our minds to have good pictures, and thoroughly to enjoy them, and to allow our friends to do so.

In the arrangement of the pictures themselves, finally, we have a few words of advice to offer. It is far more important than many people imagine to dispose the pictures symmetrically upon the walls, and there is a vast difference between good and bad picture-hanging. Select for the centre of each wall, be it the side of a room or the space between two doors or openings, a good picture to form a centre. Let this picture be sufficiently large and important to occupy this position, and choose two well matched pictures as *pendants*, to place on either side of it. If these pictures are less in height than the centre, let the bottoms of the pictures form the level line, and keep to this same line round the room. If the room is lofty other smaller pictures may be placed above these lower pictures. Do not hang large heavy pictures immediately above smaller ones. Reserve such pictures, if of minor importance, for the spaces above doors and sideboards, or other large pieces of furniture. Small pictures with minute detail, should be placed sufficiently near the eye to permit of close observation. It is bad hanging to place a low-toned quiet picture in immediate proximity to brilliant and highly colored canvasses. It is said, in such a position, to be "killed" by them, and it is a poor compliment to the artist to select such a place for his work. The great skill in arranging pictures consists therefore, in so assorting them as to subject and to size,



DESIGN FOR DINING ROOM CHANDELIER, BY R. CUASTAVINO.

for which we have to find places on the walls, and everything else must be subordinated to them.

One of the earliest matters the picture lover is called upon to decide, when preparing his rooms for pictures, is the best color to select for his wall-paper or hangings. This is a subject upon which there has been at all times considerable differences of opinion. It is, no doubt, very difficult to choose a color which shall be equally well suited to all classes of pictures. The cool, green landscape requires a different background to the brilliant *genre* picture, or the forcibly painted portrait. But in choosing the tint for our walls, we must be guided by the character of the chief portion of our pictures, and bear in mind, at the same time, the uses to which the apartment is to be placed—the quality of the lighting, as influenced by the window-space, the aspect, and the height of the room, are all matters which must not be overlooked. The color, perhaps, which agrees best with all kinds of pictures is a species of dull claret, or maroon red; a neutral or tea-green tint with a little gold diaper pattern dispersed over it, also does well for most pictures, and looks cheerful in a sitting room; the red shades are more suitable for dining rooms, galleries and passages. The members of the Royal Academy of London, after much deliberation on the subject, selected a tint for their walls supposed to resemble that of the pheasant's wing, a warm brown inclining slightly to red.

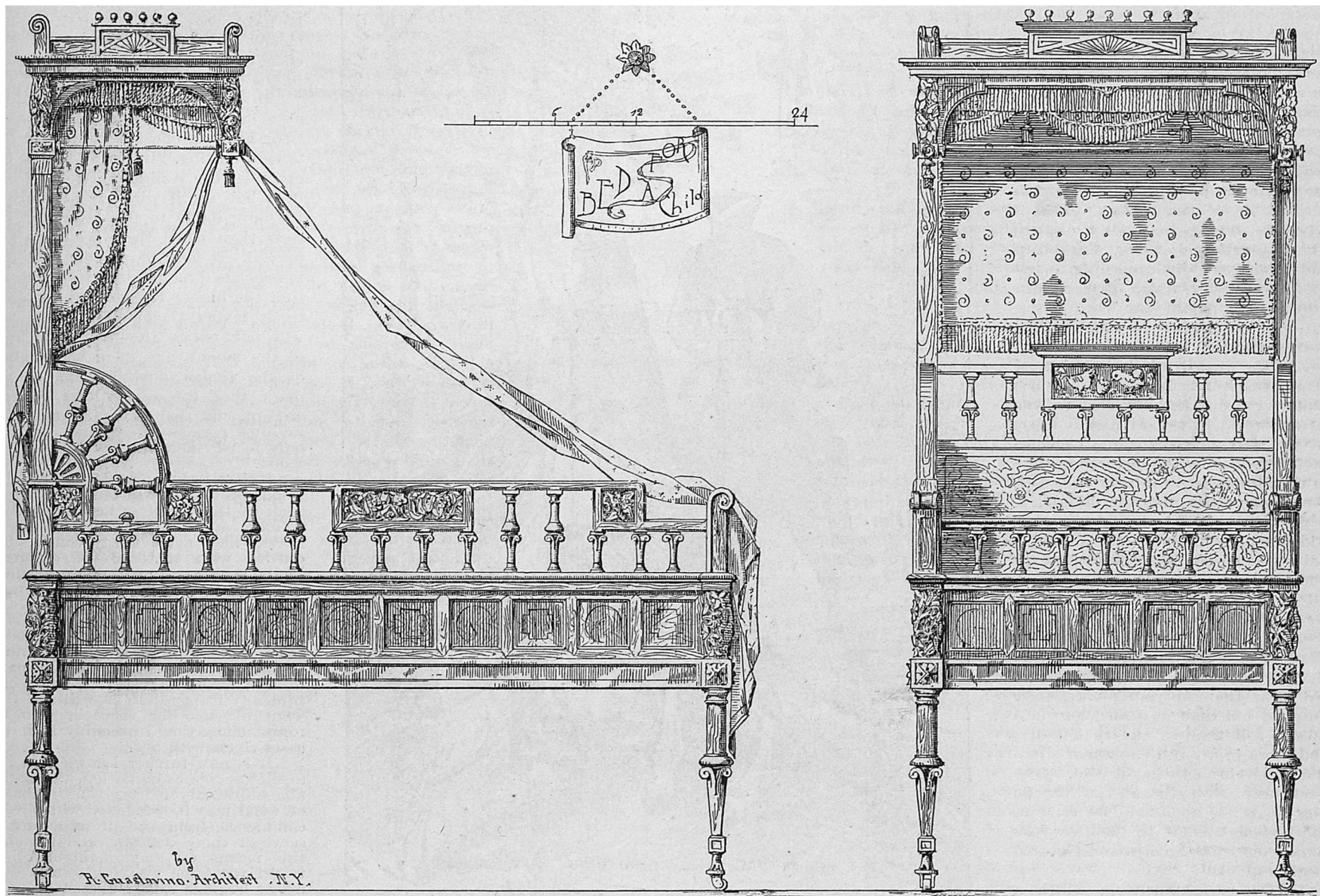
and with respect to the key in which they are painted, that they can be symmetrically disposed on the walls; that they can be seen to advantage in a good light at a proper distance; that they go well together in harmony of coloring and in relative brilliancy; and, finally, that as respects the scale of the detail and the size, the height at which they are placed enables them to be readily seen and admired. It is a bad plan to mix together pictures painted in various mediums; oil and water-color paintings should not be hung side by side. The oil pictures may be placed on a dark, rich paper in the dining room, and the water-color drawings will be shown to greater advantage on a more delicately tinted paper in the drawing room. Water-colors, be it remembered, require plenty of light to be seen well, and do best in frames with white and gold mounts. Never hang any of your pictures on a wall where they can be reached by the direct rays of the sunlight. Bright sunlight rapidly takes the color out of a drawing, and soon causes it to look faded and dull. Rapid changes of temperature and extremes of heat and cold are very bad for pictures, and the rooms in which fine pictures are placed should be kept, as far as possible, at a uniform temperature throughout the

take a cursory survey of the great globe itself, in order that we may take note in which of the three zones there is evidence of the greatest amount of human aggregation—let us, I say, take a cursory glance, for this will at once enable us to perceive that this occurs in the Temperate, and why?—because the climatic conditions of this zone are less extreme; because, in fact, all its conditions are more moderate, and apposite to the human constitution, than those of the other zones—not only as regards temperature, but in the general disposition of land and water, of hill and vale, in the characteristics of its fauna and of its vegetation, and also in its relations of light, shade and color. It is these moderate conditions, in fact, which render the Temperate zone apposite to the human constitution, for man occupies the central or mid-point in animated nature. The Temperate zone has, therefore, become the great home of human existence and of civilization.

We may, in the next place, endeavor to determine the chief characteristic of what is termed the progressive tendency, of this huge human community, dwelling within the confines of the Temperate zone. Now we may learn from history, that its first efforts were directed to the mitigation of the

most probably pursued in early times by instinct rather than by reason. But now, that we are able to grip moderation as a principle, the scientific principle of rectitude in all things, we ought to clutch it with a more determined hand, and hold it up as the great ruling principle in all human action.

It may, probably, be urged that the good effects of moderation in government, in temperature, in eating and drinking, &c., &c., may be all very well, that moderation in these matters yield solid results in the increased stability of society, and in respect to health and the duration of life; but that moderation in design, light, shade and color is of no material importance. That the law of moderation, *i.e.*, proportion in decorative matters is of no moment. But have we not irrefragable evidence that the human instinct has always tended, in the long run, towards the moderate or proportioned in art, and that art in its progressive development has ever left its extreme peculiarities and eccentricities behind, as proofs of its inexperience and to be termed by posterity, archaic? And when we note, too, with what enduring, unflagging pertinacity, the moderate in art and decoration has been pursued, we cannot but conclude that this



year. There should, also, be efficient and thorough ventilation, as foul air is as bad for paintings as it is for human beings.

Such are a few of the considerations which occur to us respecting the arrangement of works of art. We think from what we have said on this subject, it will be evident to our readers that for the due display of pictures a good many matters must be taken into consideration, and we hope that all lovers of works of art will readily concede, that they deserve the care and attention which we have claimed for them.

MODERATION IN DECORATION.

BY W. CAVE THOMAS.

It may be accepted as a general theorem, that "the best condition of every human surrounding, is that most conducive to mental and physical health." But how, it may naturally be inquired, are these best conditions of man's surroundings to be ascertained? That is, indeed, the question which has to be solved by a process of induction, by tracing and recording the progressive experiences of mankind. Let us, then, in the first place

extremes of climatic change within this region, to moderate them by art—by means of dwellings, clothing and the equalization of food supplies, by garnering in the productive seasons. Contemporaneously with these moderating tendencies, we may also note the first attempts at government, some endeavor to protect the weak against the strong, and with these advances in civilization beads, feathers and positive colors make their appearance in personal adornment, and in the decoration of trappings and of implements. In all these first steps in civilization, it may be noticed that man's attempts to render his surroundings apposite to his nature, to conform them to his own feelings and will, are, when compared with those which succeed them, extreme; but as man gradually progresses in the art of government, in the mode of housing, clothing, feeding and decorating, this progression has always been towards surrounding himself with those temperate conditions, intermediate between the torrid and frigid zones, if I may thus term them, of the too-much and the too-little in everything, towards that golden mean lying between excess and deficit. Man not only instinctively trended from all points of the compass towards the temperate zone, but intellectually from all mental extremes towards the principle of moderation. This path of temperance, however, was

ultimately proportioned condition of art, is, in some way or other, conducive to human well-being and health. On the other hand, we may predict with unflinching certainty, from the prevalence of any crude or peculiar form of art, at any period in the history of a nation, either that the nation was in its infancy, or that its social conditions were morbid. It is its moderation, its proportion, which constitutes the transcendent excellence of Greek art. The principles of art and of good taste are, in fact, nothing more nor less than the principle of moderation applied to art and to taste. Persons who are not in the habit of thinking deeply are too apt to imagine that truth, to be truth, must be far fetched, and that, when found, it ought to appear to be something very complex, whereas it generally proves to be something unexpectedly simple, and something which has been lying unnoticed and daily trampled under their very feet.

Why, if persons would only take the trouble to think how Nature, herself, has solved the question of light and color for them, they would at once come to the conclusion that we have arrived at, for has she not provided men with eyebrows, eyelashes, and contracting and expanding pupils, in order to regulate the access of light to the retina? And not only has she done this, but she has blended all her different colors in a moderated